

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Congressman Pence delivered the following speech on the floor of the House of Representatives concerning H.R. 2499, the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009.

**I rise in support of the Puerto Rico Democracy Act, which simply grants the people of Puerto Rico a say in their future.**

**First, a little history lesson.**

**The American flag has flown over Puerto Rico for more than a century. It has been a U.S. territory since 1898. The people of Puerto Rico have been citizens of the United States since 1917. Citizens born in Puerto Rico are natural-born U.S. citizens bound by Federal law. They pay Federal payroll taxes, and they are even eligible to be elected President.**

**American citizens from Puerto Rico have been drafted into military service during World War II and every war ever since--five Medal of Honor winners from Puerto Rico--65,034 Puerto Ricans served in World War II alone.**

**It has been an enormous contribution to the life of this Nation by these American citizens.**

**As a conservative who believes in the power of self-determination and of individual liberty, I believe the 4 million American citizens in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico should be able to voice their opinions about Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States, although the ultimate determination of that fate rests with this Congress, and I am pleased to stand in a long line of Republicans who have taken that view. Every Republican President for the last 50 years has been committed to self-determination and democracy for the American citizens in Puerto Rico.**

**In 1982, President Ronald Reagan said, ``Puerto Ricans have borne the responsibilities of U.S. citizenship with honor and courage for more than 64 years. They have fought beside us for decades and have worked beside us for generations." He also added Puerto Rico's ``strong tradition of democracy provides leadership and stability" in the Caribbean. I agree.**

**If the American citizens of Puerto Rico choose independence, I will support that vote. If the American citizens of Puerto Rico choose statehood, I will support that vote. I am equally confident that this Congress will be able to resolve any difficult issues about taxation, obligations of individuals and, most importantly, about the need for English to be the official language prior to any offering of statehood to that territory.**

**The American citizens of Puerto Rico have fought, have bled, and have died in our military, on virtually every continent, in order to spread democracy and the right of self-determination. It seems to me it would be the height of hypocrisy for this Congress to deny the very same rights for which Americans have fought all over this world to the American citizens of Puerto Rico.**

**I know this is a difficult and a contentious debate, and I hold in the highest regard my colleagues who take a different view; but for me, for President Ronald Reagan, and for all freedom-loving Americans, I believe with all of my heart the time has come to adopt the Puerto Rico Democracy Act and to begin the process of allowing the American citizens of Puerto Rico to determine what will be their destiny, and we will determine it as well.**